

One Easter a priest and a taxi driver both died and went to heaven. St. Peter was at the Pearly gates waiting for them.

'Come with me,' said St. Peter to the taxi driver.

The taxi driver did as he was told and followed St Peter to a mansion. It had everything you could imagine from a bowling alley to an Olympic size pool.

'Oh my word, thank you,' said the taxi driver.

Next, St. Peter led the priest to a rough old shack with a bunk bed and a little old television set.

'Wait, I think you are a little mixed up,' said the priest. 'Shouldn't I be the one who gets the mansion? After all I was a priest, went to church every day, and preached God's word.'

'Yes, that's true.' said St Peter, 'But your Easter sermons sent people to sleep. When the taxi driver drove, everyone prayed.'

How many times have you looked at old photographs and wondered why you took them. Far removed from the sound and smells and the immediacy of the event it is hard to recapture the excitement that should accompany the memory. And try sharing the memory with someone who wasn't there!!

And how does one share a mystery?

The fact is that it is necessary for the others to see for themselves what I saw, before there is any hope of real understanding or appreciation taking place. *"For those who don't understand, no words are possible, and for those who do understand, no words are necessary"*. That's the sense we have when reading the resurrection story. It tells of a deeply mysterious fact, but we can't quite capture what its impact was within the hearts of Jesus's followers, that first Easter day.

As is so often the case when reading scripture, we can be on or more of the characters we are reading about. In this are we like Mary Magdalene who told the others the news of resurrection? Or like the apostles who responded immediately by running to the tomb to see for themselves. When did you first hear about the resurrection, and when did you first experience it? And what was your reaction to the discovery? Maybe it came in moments of darkness and desolation, and a cry to God for help. Abandonment is one of

the greatest losses a human may experience. True, there are other losses that can scar us.

Mary Magdalene in the garden. She's weeping bitterly. She has lost the most important person in her life. *"They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."* Jesus, her beloved, is dead. She can't even find his body. She can't spend a few minutes with his body, mourning, remembering, crying, loving.

The disciples were told all this was going to happen, and Mary should have expected something of the sort, and particularly as many scholars assure us that Mary Magdalene was the only one of them who was truly on the same wavelength as Jesus! Still she is clearly distressed and sorely grieving, and we cannot fail to be moved by her tears.

We can imagine her stumbling through the garden, her tears making it difficult for her to see, anguished sobs wracking her body? She looks into the tomb, hears the angels' question. In her distress, she frantically answers that the body of her Lord has been taken, and then she turns around. With eyes swollen and flooded with tears, she is asked the same question and gives a similar answer. But then she hears his Voice; the voice she did not recognize before; the voice she did not understand until it speaks her name, and then she is free of the grief and begins to feel, the great joy that we are to feel this day – and indeed our entire lives.

Surely, life of great joy and freedom and peace should be our "new normal," should it not? We are, this day, celebrating the most remarkable notion that humans have ever imagined: the great God, Creator of the Universe, has moved in time to change the rules. What a mystery! That is truly amazing, dumbfounding, wildly joyful: and mysterious! On this day our joy is uncontainable; we begin to celebrate the new life that is ours in a particularly exuberant and outgoing way, for we are an Easter people, a forgiven people, a people loved beyond measure; but we are also people who still must live in a world that is full of temptation and is fraught with peril. We live as a people with a vision that goes beyond this world, but that vision does not take us out of the world. That vision compels us back, more deeply into the world to proclaim with the psalmist: "This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."

When we hear his voice, when we are able to hear him calling our names, it is then that we experience the resurrection: it is then that we can lay hold to the promised joy, unspeakable. Hitherto lost in the grief of separation we are transformed by the light of recognition. Yes, of course we live in a world so filled with noise that we can barely hear ourselves think. But our Saviour's voice has the kind of quality that cuts through the cacophony. It is not loud or overbearing. It is persistent and sweet – patiently repeating our names in a wonderful repetition of love and peace. This world seems so filled with much that would seem to be bent on drawing us away from that sweet voice. We certainly need to make a huge and constant effort, to hear the voice of Jesus.

The heart-rending details of the final suffering of our Lord reveal how deep God's empathy is for the pain and sin of the world and how far the divine love will go to redeem them. Evil in so many forms – political, religious, psychological, and spiritual – poured itself out completely in this event. Yet all these forces exhausted themselves without finally exhausting the faith, hope, and love of God in what happened. In a way, the forces of evil, as powerful as they are, were finally put in their place, exposed as ultimately unreal, and finally overcome in resurrection. The resurrection is the place in human history where evil, injustice, and prejudice are transfigured into justice, goodness, and enlightenment.

Here we have an utterly unique, mind-blowing, heart-changing, spirit-restoring mystery of God. The resurrection cannot finally be assessed by human method. Various attempts have been made to explain what happened, ranging from denial that Jesus died at all, to him being drugged, to mischievous lies by the disciples, or that Jesus appeared to people suffering grief-induced hallucinations. No! With the resurrection, there seems to be something world-changing and transformative going on.

In the end, a belief in Easter is a decision of the mind and the heart. It is a choice. You can believe the witnesses who say that something remarkable occurred that has gone on recreating the world ever since by the triumph of life over death, of love over hate, of light over darkness. Or you can believe that the witnesses were mistaken and that life and death, love and hate, light and darkness are evenly matched and that there is no ultimate power for good that is stronger than death.

It is very simple: we either choose to have faith, or we don't. But the decision we make about Easter will profoundly affect the way we live and other choices we make for the rest of our lives. We choose to walk in an Easter light and to live by an Easter faith because we know it brings abundant life and makes intuitive sense even in the middle of death, hatred, and darkness.

Maybe we can only understand the resurrection as an unrepeatable miracle of love. Love is its only meaning because love is the only survivor, because God is love all the way through. The only people to whom the Risen Christ appeared were people who loved him. The Resurrection, therefore, is made visible and possible for those who experienced it because of the love that was in them, because God is love and because God loved the world so much that he gave Christ to these people in a new and living way. With them, if we believe that love is stronger than death, then we can believe in Easter, and know that divine love is alive within us!

A last word from D. H. Lawrence perhaps

Are you willing to be sponged out, erased, cancelled,
made nothing?

Are you willing to be made nothing?
dipped into oblivion?

If not, you will never really change.

The phoenix renews her youth
only when she is burnt, burnt alive, burnt down
to hot and flocculent ash.

Then the small stirring of a new small bub in the nest
with strands of down like floating ash
shows that she is renewing her youth like the eagle,
immortal bird.

"Phoenix"

Like Mary we move from the ashes and blindness of grief to the resurrection experience of being called by name to new life by Jesus.